

NATIONAL ALCOHOL SCREENING DAY SAMPLE OP-ED

Impaired driving is a deadly problem on America's roadways. The 17,013 fatalities in alcohol-related crashes during 2003 represent an average of one alcohol-related fatality every 31 minutes. In addition, 86 percent of those were killed in crashes where at least one driver or nonoccupant had a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 0.08 g/dl or higher.

Given these facts, it makes sense to create a comprehensive strategy to address impaired driving which includes not only criminal prosecution and adjudication for those identified by police as impaired drivers, but also finding and treating those with an alcohol use problem who may become an impaired driver. About 35 percent of the adult US population abstains from alcohol use, about 60 percent are occasional to moderate drinkers, and about 5 to 7 percent are diagnosable with alcohol abuse or dependence (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1997). Reaching that 5 to 7 percent will help address the impaired driving problem, but first we have to find them.

Alcohol use problems can be found by asking a series of questions. Simply asking how much and how often a person drinks can reveal if their alcohol use is of concern. Of course, for some people drinking any alcohol is a not safe – pregnant woman and those who are taking certain medications are just two examples. In addition, drinking alcohol while under the age of 21 is illegal in every state.

Medical research shows that screening and brief intervention is effective in changing drinking patterns among problem drinkers and also suggests it may prevent future impaired driving episodes.

National Alcohol Screening Day on April 7, 2005, highlights a community response for those in need of help, and aids in finding resources for those with alcohol problems. That's why **[Local Leader /Organization]** is joining with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to promote National Alcohol Screening Day by offering screening at **[Time /Place]**.

One day is a good start, but for real reductions in the consequences of dangerous drinking, alcohol screening must become an everyday effort. If we incorporate alcohol screening into daily medical and community health practice and provide those who have a problem with intervention, we will subsequently impact the incidence of drunk driving on our nation's roadways.

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